



1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut

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PRESERVING, CONSERVING AND GROWING SMART

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Budget for
DECD, DEP and CCT

February 17, 2009

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator Duff, Representative Backer, members of the Appropriations Committee, good evening, my name is Heidi Green. I am the president of the statewide smart growth organization, 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut. 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut conducts research, education and advocacy on the interconnected web of policies that sustain robust cities, lively walkable neighborhoods, transit and affordable housing options, while maintaining a healthy natural environment for clean air, water, wildlife habitat, and a viable agricultural sector.

As you can imagine, I go to a lot of meetings and since the release of the Governor's budget, most of those meetings have been full of anxious, strategic discussions about saving one program, including – the Community Investment Act, the Historic Tax Credit, the Housing Trust Fund, Brownfield Remediation and Redevelopment grants and loans, staff to oversee these programs, and staff to monitor state agencies so their actions reflect the needs of the people, even when that conflicts with the immediate priorities of the executive and/or legislative branches.

Instead of spending our three minutes together listing all the valuable programs in the state and why they should be maintained, I'd like to call on you to keep in mind the bigger

picture and the need, especially now, for the state to increase its investment in growing smart and sustainably.

Investing in smart growth now will have both immediate and long-term returns to the state. It will leverage federal reinvestment and recovery dollars immediately to create more jobs, and their accompanying multiplier effect on the state economy. In the longer term, smart investments will sustain prosperity in the state, help clean up our air and water, help reduce our dependence on foreign oil, reduce our food insecurity, and make Connecticut a desirable and competitive destination for new businesses and residents.

Investing in smart, sustainable development now will provide jobs and help us pull out of the economic downturn. There is a significant backlog of demand for state gap financing and subsidy that could translate into hundreds of jobs within a matter of weeks. There are good smart projects all over the state that have ground to a halt waiting for capital – affordable housing projects, transit oriented development projects, brownfield projects... If the state increased its level of investment in smart development at the same time we're expecting an infusion of federal funds to create or protect 41,000 jobs, Connecticut would be soon be well on its way to economic recovery.

In the longer term, developing compact, mixed use areas near transit means that people can walk from home to work to school or errands. Developing more places like this will help our businesses attract younger workers (who have a documented preference for vital urban spaces), reduce the costs to business associated with providing free parking; reduce labor costs by allowing employees to cut commutes and increase their productive hours at work, and would provide remediation and construction jobs.

It will benefit our citizens. Focusing development in existing areas leaves farmland available for agriculture, providing more locally-grown food. Building compact mixed use places with row houses, town homes, condominiums and rental apartments provides more housing choices to meet millennials and empty-nesters' demand for smaller units. It increases elderly citizens' independence by allowing them to walk or take public transit instead of waiting for hours for the dial-a-ride to show up, or drive alone in their cars when they might not see as well as they used to or their reflexes aren't quite as sharp as they once were. Smart growth reduces the social isolation we find in homebound suburban kids, and older citizens; and increases a sense of community identity and engagement. Transit oriented development also allows people to afford more house, as the transportation costs of transit-using households is nearly half that of household who have to rely on the family automobile. Growing smarter and more sustainably will help Connecticut attract new residents, and with them, new skills, talents and jobs.

Finally, encouraging smart, sustainable development reduces green house gas emissions by providing transportation alternatives to the single passenger automobile; and developing densities that allow people to walk and bike. Higher densities encourage new development on a scale that allows for clean energy innovation, and protects our streams, rivers and aquifers by reducing run off.

The benefits of changing how and where we develop are many and irrefutable. We'll experience some right away while the benefits of preventing further unsustainable development, we can only imagine. If we do not invest now, we will miss critical opportunities to capitalize on lower real estate values, and the opportunity to leverage the federal investment.

Changing how we develop in Connecticut won't be inexpensive. It requires that we coordinate our investments. (1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut recommends we make smart growth a filter for all state investments, programs and regulations.) In many of our older industrial areas, we have sewer, water, and often transit infrastructure. We also have environmentally contaminated sites.

Currently, it's easier and carries lower sunk costs to develop greenfield properties. To put brownfields on a more equal footing, we need to offer subsidy to cover the cost to have the contamination evaluated, a clean-up plan produced, implemented and then signed-off on. The budget before you has no money for subsidy or staff.

Historic properties make Connecticut unique, add to our sense of place, and increase the value of neighboring properties. Considering life-cycle energy demand, reusing existing buildings is also the greenest development practice. But the per-unit costs to redevelop are often higher than to develop new. The Governor's budget eliminates \$12,000,000 from an account that provides funds for historic renovations and suspends the historic preservation tax credit, in addition, she eliminates staff to approve funding and oversee restorations.

In all but a handful of our cities and towns, housing costs are so high they limit the vitality and competitiveness of our communities. Developers report that land values and construction costs in the state, even when they're allowed higher densities and mixed uses, often make it impossible to close the affordable housing equation without state subsidy. We need programs and staff to increase our supply of affordable housing.

Along the Connecticut River Valley, we have some of the best farmland soils on the planet. Throughout the state there are aquifer areas, ridgelines, prominent landscape features, etc.

that are in the interest of this and future generations to protect from development. We need the funds to preserve priority properties, the staff to evaluate applications for land preservation grants, and staff to monitor how the government manages its open lands.

The Appropriations Committee reflects the vision of the General Assembly and protects the priorities of the state's citizens. The people of Connecticut want the state to grow and prosper, sustainably. I urge you to budget adequate resources to the programs and investments that will advance smart, sustainable development. As a cost savings measure, 1000 FRIENDS also recommends all state investments be filtered with a smart growth screen, so that preference goes to programs and projects that advance smart growth goals.

The economic downturn may last a year-or-more. If we deploy state revenues to leverage federal reinvestment and recovery funds, it will ease more quickly. If we don't, our economy will rebound slowly. And in the meantime, we may lose the opportunity for smart growth for generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. Please think of 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut as a resource in the weeks ahead. I'm happy to field any questions you may have this evening.

The Board and Staff of 1000 FRIENDS of Connecticut

Heidi Green, President

